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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, July 12, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CAMPFIRE DISHES." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

A lady who signs herself "Home Camper" has just written for some recipes suitable for open-fire cooking. She says her husband and young son have just completed a stone fireplace out toward the end of her backyard. And she says she has a nice stretch of lawn and some pleasant shade trees, tables and chairs and everything for outdoor meals except good food ideas.

Well, I've made a tour of my camping friends since that letter came in. I've talked with one family who make a specialty of what they call "backyard barbecues." And I've talked with several old hands at woods camping and cooking. I've consulted outdoor cooks that hail from New England and others from Oregon.

So now for some ideas that I hope will be helpful not only to this lady who wants to cook in her new fireplace but also to any of you who will be cooking outdoors anywhere this summer.

First, about your fire. As all good campers know, the best fire for outdoor cooking is one that you can handle easily, and that's a small one. Use only dry and seasoned wood to build it. And, if possible, get your fire built half an hour or so before you want it. Then, let it burn down to coals, replenishing it occasionally until you have a deep bed of glowing embers. Red coals not flames do the best cooking. A large and flaming fire burns your hands, smokes your face, and blackens your food.

A grate is almost an essential if you're going to do much cooking over an open fire. One of the grates from the oven of your kitchen stove will work well enough if you lay it on top of the foundation stones. Of you can use one of the regular camping grates with four folding wire legs that you can plant firmly in the ground. For broiling over the coals, you'll also find a regular meat broiler with a long handle useful. You know, you can use this either over or under your grate.

For a real party you may want to serve steak. Here are some tips on making that campfire steak perfect. Don't have it cut too thick. An inch and a quarter is about right for cooking over embers. For easy handling, cut the steak in strips that you can turn easily over the fire with a fork or that will fit easily into your broiler and also in between your rolls or sandwiches.

First, sear the steak quickly by holding it close to the fire until it browns on one side. Then, turn it over and brown it on the other side. Put the salt and pepper on after cooking -- not before. A camp cook I know likes to put several strips of bacon in his broiler first; then the steak; and then a few slices of large mild onion on top. He starts bacon side down, turns carefully now and then, and broils until the steak and onions are done. The bacon shrivels up and often blackens, too, but the flavor remains. Before serving, he seasons his steak well with salt and pepper. Another friend likes her campfire steak spread with mustard or barbecue sauce before broiling.

Do you know how to make a western sandwich over a campfire? Here are the directions I've learned for this popular masculine sandwich. Cook a small chopped onion in a frying pan with about two tablespoons of butter or other fat. Then add about a half cup of chopped ham and four eggs. Stir and cook until the eggs get firm and have that scrambled look. Now spread the mixture between buttered slices of bread or toast.

Camp cooks from New England always have much to say about clam bakes. You may have your own special way of "clam baking." But the general idea seems to be to rake fire from the stones on which it has burned for hours; then to cover the stones with sea-weed or wet hay; then to lay on clams in the shell; and finally to cover them with more seaweed and a tarpaulin and let them "bake" or steam for 2 or 3 hours. I hear that you can do a good job this way on sweet corn in the husk, and frankfurters wrapped in corn husks, too -- only allow less time for the latter.

Ever hear of cheese bobs on a picnic? They're quick and easy to cook and delicious in rolls or sandwiches. Wrap a small square of cheese in two strips of bacon. Stick this little package on the sharp end of a pointed stick, or on the prongs of a long-handled broiling fork. Broil until the bacon is done. Have your bread handy, for cheese is likely to drip when hot.

Shish kebabs are an old tried-and-true favorite for outdoor cooking. For kebabs, you use either long sharp sticks or metal skewers. Cut lamb in cubes and impale on your skewer -- first a piece of lamb, then a slice of onion, then a piece of bacon or a bit of fat pork, then lamb again and so on. Broil over a fire of coals.

We're always hearing how good coffee is when cooked over an open fire. Cocoa also deserves praise as a campfire beverage, especially for the younger picnickers. Camp cocoa is easy to make, either with canned or fresh milk. You can use half canned milk and half water, and mix your sugar and cocoa together at home if carrying fresh milk is difficult. The proportions for each cup of cocoa are: 1 teaspoon of cocoa, 1 teaspoon of sugar, 1/2 cup of milk; 1/2 cup of water. A pinch of salt will help the flavor. When you're ready to make the cocoa, mix a little water with the dry cocoa and sugar until you have a smooth paste. Put the rest of the water on to boil over the fire. When the water is hot, add the canned milk. Bring it just to the boiling point. Then add the sugar and cocoa paste. Beat and serve. Of course, if you use sweetened condensed milk, you won't need sugar.

Fruit juices are also good picnic beverages and go to the spot especially in hot weather. Chilled seasoned tomato juice is another good picnic drink.

You'll probably want a fresh green salad with your campfire steaks, sandwiches or kebabs. But if you can't manage fresh vegetables, you can always heat up canned vegetables over a campfire -- canned tomatoes and corn, for example, or canned lima beans in tomato sauce, or succotash.

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